

European Report SUMMARY: THENUCE - Thematic Network in University Continuing Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

THENUCE was funded by the Socrates Programme, Strand 1 - Higher Education, and by the participating partners. The name of the project was "Thematic Network Project on University Continuing Education" with the number 26-203-CP-1-96-1-BE-ERASMUS-ETN. The project was coordinated by EUCEN and lasted from September 1996 until August 1999. The coordinator was Professor Victor de Kosinsky, Université de Liège, and the Scientific Chair was Professor Alfredo Soeiro, Universidade do Porto. The project THENUCE main outputs are hosted at www.fe.up.pt/~nuce.

This project was initiated by EUCEN, the European Universities Continuing Education Network (www.eucen.eu). Since its founding meeting in May 1991 EUCEN had grown rapidly and today, with over 170 member universities in 34 countries, it is the largest European University network in the field of Continuing Education.

Continuing Education is an integral and essential part of the universities contribution to European development through the provision of the Lifelong Learning process. The Thematic Network project, THENUCE, aimed to give a new wider European dimension and target to the network activities by developing Europe-wide actions and means of identifying and disseminating good practice.

For the first year a Scientific Committee, with experts from 20 countries, had the task of identifying and collecting existing good practices and obstacles/problems in consultation with all partners in their own country and to prepare a national report for the Committee. Based on the National Reports, the Scientific Committee Chair, in conjunction with all partners, prepared a European Report on the theme, which, with the National Reports, intended to be a Working Document on European University Continuing Education.

The report, that substantiated this summary, was a result of a collective effort but it is worth underlining the dedicated work of members of the Scientific Committee: Franz Reichl (AT), Herman Baert (BE), Helle Otte (DK), Anders Berg-Sørensen (DK), Ossi Tuomi (FI), Michel Feutrie (FR), Gernot Graessner (DE), Ernst Prokop (DE), Dionysis Rigopoulos (GR), Margret Bjornsdottir (IS), Tom Collins (EI), Giuseppe Ronsisvale (IT), Dieter Gunz (LU), Pieter Vroegrop (NL), Toine Andernach (NL), Olav Vaagland (NO), Julian Auleytner (PL), Manuel Assunção (PT), Armando Palomar (ES), Håkan Sandberg (SE), Geneviève Auroi-Jaggi (CH), Michael Osborne (UK), Albert Kommer (DE), the contributions from Andris Barblan (CRE), Inez Wijngaarde (UNIDO) and Dominique de Garady (ERT), the help from Maria Esmeralda Almeida Teixeira (EC-DG XXII) and from Elizabeth Ogden (Socrates TAO), the co-operation from EUCEN of Edward Thomas and of Filip Santy, the efforts from the assistants (Christian Exl, Hughes Waroquier, Stephan Geury and especially of Stéphanie de Geeter and the leadership of Victor de Kosinsky.

"This present report is an example where voluntary work is a major force in development when properly used and all those mentioned above deserve sincere thanks and esteem." (Quote from Alfredo Soeiro, Chair of Scientific Committee)

"All Men by Nature Desire to Know", Aristotle, Metaphysics.

2. PROJECT GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Continuing Education is an integral and essential part of the universities contribution to European development through the provision of the Lifelong Learning process. However, University Continuing Education (UCE) was not developed and practiced to the same extent and level in all European states and there are parts of Europe where it was almost totally non-existent.

EUCEN was been set up in response to the need to serve more effectively the people of Europe through the transfer of good practice and innovation in UCE and through the identification and research of answers to obstacles to the provision of high quality UCE throughout Europe.

The Thematic Network THENUCE project aimed at giving a new wider European dimension and target to the network activities, building on what EUCEN had started on a limited scale, by developing Europe-wide actions and by means of identifying and disseminating such good practice. EUCEN also aimed to promote closer co-operation with and between existing national associations.

The first year objectives were of identifying and collecting existing good practice and obstacles/problems in consultation with all partners in their own country and to prepare a national report for the project Scientific Committee. Several key issues were presented that need further development and research that should be addressed by dedicated working groups.

During the second year the working groups developed specific tools for the Scientific Committee with selected partners. The deliverables of the second operational year were publications, active Internet networking, WWW homepages, traditional and ODL tools, courses, summer school, electronic journal, etc., to enhance the development of UCE and of university staff on a European level.

The last year of THENUCE was the dissemination year dedicated to the transmission and acquisition of new knowledge, including recognition and validation of skills and introducing new more flexible ways of acquisition and accreditation of skills. Mobility and dialogue with the economic sector were also targeted. The project was extended to partners outside of the Thematic Network.

The project was initiated with 88 partner universities and UCE related bodies. The initial steps were to create the communications infrastructure between the partners. For that goal a homepage and a dedicated list-server were created in November 96. The main results of the activities were organized in Main Findings, a SWOT Analysis of UCE, Future of UCE, European Comparative Tables, Comments by UNIDO and by CRE Annexes and Executive Summaries for each participating country.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

Some common issues were identified. There was currently no clear-cut European definition of UCE. In its place there was a multitude of conceptions covering a wide range of practices. It was sometimes difficult even to find a clear and unanimous definition of UCE at the national level. The different forms of UCE included distance education as well as part-time studies and full time university studies. However, the frontiers between adult and continuing education, as well as between initial and continuing education were more and more difficult to draw. The concept of Lifelong Learning and the Right to Study was nevertheless taking the lead in the discussions about new educational needs.

Regarding the legislative framework of UCE activities at university level, the involvement of governments was variable. It can vary from setting up laws implementing UCE as a function of the University together with research and training of both graduates and post-graduates at one end of the scale, to a lack of interest and thus a lack of institutional and financial support at the other. The strategies ranged from a will to plan an overall policy for UCE, to merely dealing with emergency as they arrived. However, in a number of countries the topic was currently very much on the political agenda and there was a general growing awareness of the urgent need of UCE: trade unions,

companies, the professions and governmental bodies are increasingly taking UCE into account in their strategic plans. It has been suggested, for example, that future negotiations within trades and industries will change from wage negotiations to competence negotiations and the workers' right to education.

A recurrent political argument was that investment in human capital was important for the economic growth and development of society, and that increased access to training will help sustain economic competitiveness with international rivals. UCE was seen as an important key to University-Society co-operation. Concerning employed workers, the aims were to promote personal and professional development in order to improve the competitiveness of companies, to adapt human resources to technological innovation and to promote the development of new economic activities. On the other hand, vocational education was seeking to bring unemployed people's knowledge, skills and attitude into line with the new professional profiles required by the labour market. UCE was the point of intersection of new research findings and practical working life.

The difficulty of assessing the situation of UCE had been stressed in the reports and the need to develop its investigation and evaluation at the European level had been expressed. Regarding organisational arrangements, it seemed that UCE activities in universities were best implemented in designated UCE centres or departments, which had developed a particular expertise in programming, monitoring and evaluating these activities. Such centres were able to co-operate efficiently with the industry and the business world to discuss the educational needs of the region, to establish co-operation agreements with other UCE providers (trade unions, private institutions...), and to promote international co-operation in teaching and training.

There were, at the time, very little financial incentives for UCE staff whose motivation originated in a personal interest in adult teaching and from the opportunity of having contacts with their professions and the application of their subjects. The provision was currently slanted towards short intensive skill-oriented courses, for which participants were sometimes ready to pay high fees. Distance education was developing, and there was a demand of education in new technologies and information technologies (IT). The main actors were the adult students, their employers and market mechanisms.

Major obstacles were competition for resources with the expanding regular university education, the lack of academic recognition of CE lecturers (the emphasis in most universities remains on research), the need to raise their level of competence, and the question of financial arrangements. Openness and student-centered, two elements of flexibility, were the most significant dimensions to European level co-operation in CE, with the development of open and distance learning (ODL), quality control and accreditation.

Concerning the different concepts of UCE it involved mainly (though not exclusively) post-initial higher education studies. UCE concerned four areas: the enlargement of the basic education, the updating or application of the knowledge of the basic discipline, the retraining because of the lack of future employment possibilities and finally the specialisation in a given discipline. There was a multitude of concepts covering a wide range of practices. The different forms for these types of CE included distance education as well as part-time studies and full-time university studies. Four types of UCE were proposed as a frame of reference:

- a) CE for university staff themselves as professional development;
- b) university education, probably part-time and possibly at a distance, leading to a totally new profession for the individual;
- c) additional university CE with the aim of complementing the former university education and thereby principally giving the individual a more complete and specialised professional competence;

d) university education that kept university graduates up-to-date with their professional field without the aim of moving them to a totally different profession.

UCE could be defined along several dimensions. The main definition of THENUCE was "all kinds of education provided by a university that takes place in a person's life, after the initial education has been finished". UCE can be further divided into education with no formal exams or credits given, and education with some kind of formalised evaluation and credit awards.

The following breakdown described the organisational levels and forms in which CE was realised: liberal education, basic vocational education, cultural education, basic general education and higher education. CE at the university can be described as an entity having seven complementary areas: professional CE, employment training, open university, regional and organisational development projects, development of teaching materials, research and publication, career services.

In terms of organisational arrangements was generally organised by faculties. In the future, these universities would probably evolve to a decentralised system in which each group, faculty or department would develop its own strategy within a global university vision of UCE. In other universities, UCE might be organised in a decentralised manner. Programmes were organised by academic staff from the faculties, departments and institutes with the help and support of the UCE Centre, which may function as an interface between the university and the business world. In a centralised body-governing of CE, UCE was run in co-operation with the users like professional organisations of academics, commonly on a totally self-financing basis, with fees coming from participants or from their companies.

Registration procedures and the arrangement of continuing education activities differed widely between universities, and it was often difficult to get statistics of part-time students, particularly non-degree and distance education programme students. Generally, however, there was a tendency for these activities to become registered centrally within each university. Universities have often organised their UCE around centres or departments with a special responsibility for these activities and it was common that UCE students were expected to pay for their UCE.

The central facilities of the universities were the most common organisational arrangement; there was also a rising number of legally independent organisations with varying forms which the universities were linked to in different ways. Almost all universities offered CE programmes, but these may be located within a variety of organisational structures with a variety of titles; the predominant title was a variant of Department (or Centre) of (or for) CE (or Adult and Continuing Education). This nomenclature perhaps reflected the move towards a greater breadth of provision and attempts to attract the continuing professional development audience. UCE and the centres for CE have been seen as means of making available the resources of the universities to the outside world.

Teaching of UCE was generally organised at the departmental level. The teaching may take place in the daytime, in the evening, at weekends and in the form of distance learning. The CE centres were created at University level and could handle all the CE programmes of the Departments. Centres at different universities could communicate and collaborate, especially for programmes of the EU. Experiences from the University Extension Centres showed that it was valuable to have a centralised unit dealing with UCE at each university. CE and knowledge transfer would play an increasingly important role in connection to innovation processes outside and inside the universities.

The subject of other providers of CE was that from the National reports there was a diversity of providers offering some form of CE. These were:

a) Professional and industrial associations usually providing CE courses for their members;

- b) Service companies, chambers of commerce, employers' associations, professional associations, trade unions, business schools, universities and other bodies that made uneven, though increasing, attempts to fulfil training needs;
- c) National CE organisations carrying out training for their members;
- d) Chambers of Commerce, Business and Economy as well as small private institutions;
- e) Trade unions, companies, and governmental bodies were increasingly taking CE into account in their strategic plans.
- f) Other university departments, state organisations, trade unions, community organisations, professional and private organisations.

Taking into account the trends of subjects of UCE the demand focused on business schools and technological schools. UCE was often related often with the short programmes in the fields of Languages, Accountancy, Health and Computers. Some growing sectors were Law, Marketing and Administration, Finance and Banking, and Pedagogy. The focus was placed upon Information Technologies, Environmental Education, Languages, Education for entrepreneurs and CE aimed at professionals who lack knowledge and skills in these areas.

UCE was composed mainly of short professional-related courses and part-time courses leading to qualifications, particularly at the post graduate level. Generally, there was a domination of post experience vocational CE. Thus the main part of UCE currently consisted of short professional training courses for updating and extending qualifications and competence. Many of the courses offered were business and professional related (for example industrial relations, personnel management, health education). The government in some cases encouraged the universities to offer their graduates "brush-up-courses" and to continuously bring graduates knowledge up-to-date (especially in communication and management).

4. SWOT ANALYSIS OF UCE

The partnership found the following after surveys and debates:

A. Strengths

- Multitude of conceptions of UCE covering a wide range of practices - richness.
- Tradition in the implementation of UCE adapted to adults in some universities - know-how.
- Development of central units or UCE centres in universities - co-ordination and expertise.
- Distinctive character of university activities associated with research - academic level.
- Growing awareness of the importance of UCE in society - development of strategies

B. Weaknesses

- In some cases lack of legislative framework and of funding from the national government - disinterest.
- Competition with other providers of CE - need to develop complementary activities.
- Links with clients and European partners are often weak - exchange of information.
- Poor co-operation with trade and industry - interaction between research and application.
- Access to university studies - accreditation of prior learning or experience and fees.
- Low status of CE within universities related to their other activities (research and teaching) - motivation.
- Need to develop programming, monitoring, evaluating and accrediting of CE activities.
- Difficulty to assess the quality of CE activities - quality development.
- Education of CE staff in adult education and training - up-to-date expertise/didactic abilities.
- Competition for resources with regular higher education courses within universities - pressure of the demand.
- Need for greater openness and flexibility both in content and form to meet new needs.
- Need to develop tailor-made courses - matching offer with demand.

C. Opportunities

- Higher education system in a state of transition - new opportunities for development of UCE.
- Investment in human capital important for the economic growth and development of society.
- Updating and extending qualifications and competence - help to fight unemployment.
- UCE may be regarded as a platform for experimenting with new programmes, supports, methods.
- Universities rethinking teaching and learning models - innovation.
- Opportunity to develop all adults' right to education - lifelong learning philosophy.
- Ageing population in Europe means more potential clients - demand for education at home/work place.
- UCE a way of opening universities - creating a modern learning environment.

- European co-operation in ODL and the development of new technologies.
- Each university could define its role in order to develop its own strategy - future scenarios.

D. Threats

- The autonomy of some UCE centres was being reduced.
- University staff concentrating on regular academic teaching - insufficient financial or strategic investment in UCE.
- In the market private CE providers were major competitors of universities.
- In some countries the number of traditional students was decreasing - fight to increase university graduate students and potential UCE users.
- Need for a transnational accreditation system – lawless competition from other universities or other CE providers.
- Universities needed to preserve their identity in the context of technological changes – moral, social and ethical challenges.

5. FUTURE OF UCE

The fundamental subjects were ageing population, unemployment, unskilled labour force, growing information society, declining birth rate and economic competition from other regions were some facts that substantiate the expectation of a growing demand for University Continuing Education (UCE) in the European Union. The traditional concept of a University was of an institution where the teaching of full time students and research have been the main activities. Changes in society implied a different attitude towards the importance of UCE levelling it at least to the same degree. This was an imperative transformation taking into account the needs of individuals, the evolution of the labour market and the global society.

UCE in the European Union was provided by private organisations and by other type of public institutions and by some universities. The tendency was to have the increase of offer of CE by the most responsive organisations due to the expected augmenting demand of CE. This diversity of providers may have been geographically extended due to the expected increase in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

The diversity of origin, of type and of forms of UCE may have justified some type of accreditation that could be widely recognised. Employers could do this validation before the delivery of the CE by designated organisations or after the provision of the CE. The former was centralised and bureaucratic and the latter was market driven and liberal. The universities may have adapted the administration of UCE to the students treating them as clients or as citizens according to their organisation, type of UCE or to the economic, social or cultural context. These activities presented moral and ethical challenges to universities that should have been addressed in a proper and timely way.

Demands were expected for the use of modern ICT and new types of knowledge. The traditional organisation of universities was not generally prepared to handle these demands that were characterised by information retrieval, handling and dissemination in unexpected forms. Training was therefore needed for university management, and particularly on UCE. To handle the transformation on UCE it was necessary to promote research on ICT and UCE and to have incorporated its results.

Universities may need to develop the links with society and other CE providers. The complexity and diversity of UCE demanded competition and imposed co-operation. The co-operation may take the form of associations, partnerships, foundations or networking. In the case of co-operation with society the activities of UCE may also help to open the universities to the exterior. Networking

should be structured to take advantage of the members' capabilities and the use of ICT according to each university's strategy.

The new type and needs of students of UCE required skilled and trained staff and flexible learning materials. Teachers were expected to take on additional functions such as professional development manager, mentor, tutor, instructor or coach. Initial education should prepare individuals for lifelong learning concepts and practices. Teachers should be rewarded by the activities in UCE at the academic career level and/or at the financial level.

Financial support of UCE should also be obtained from students, from firms, from governments or from other sources according to the specific circumstances. A compromise was envisaged between the financially self-supporting forms of UCE and UCE with a social purpose that should be sustained by the rest of the community. Appropriate management structures of UCE should be created in the University, outside the University or with a mixed status. Some of the activities of this structure are to identify UCE demands or to monitor the UCE activities or to act as a coordinator of the UCE actions.

The role of Academics in UCE identified as key issues are motivation, training and rewarding. It would also be important to address how to raise the profile and status of this activity within the academic career. The training of UCE managers should be concentrated on the main characteristics of UCE and its implications for the university structure. There should be research about the UCE learning process like the impact of new type of students, of skills acquisition, of ICT and of cultural changes created by society developments.

Another possible field of UCE development could be the creation of database of case studies taking advantage of the experience and results already achieved. A database of good and bad practices and scenarios should be created for consultation and reference. An important issue identified for UCE was the cost benefit Analysis of UCE. It was needed a detailed study undertaken to gather and interpret data about the costs and usefulness of UCE and the financing of UCE activities.

Another area to work was the networking in UCE. The forms and types of networking in UCE should be investigated in terms of their effectiveness and the usefulness of networking on a structured basis. A possible aspect for consideration was the influence of ICT on UCE. In fact, taking into account the flexibility of ICT, the possible use of ICT in UCE should be investigated in terms of a comparison with classical teaching.

Concerning UCE and the role of Universities the degree of involvement of each university in UCE activities should be evaluated and the consequences analysed allowing each institution to adopt a proper strategy. Connected with this matter the information organisation of UCE is needed due to the creation of a global market for UCE to provide the organisation of structured information on UCE.

A major aspect of UCE may be the accreditation and quality of UCE. The different forms of accreditation should be compared taking into account the needs of the different types of UCE. Quality assurance stakeholders are needed due fast changing pace of UCE. Another useful development could be a handbook of management of UCE. This handbook may be composed by a collection of guidelines for the management of UCE that could be produced describing the different practices for addressing issues such as market analysis, production, delivery and evaluation.

Considering UCE role in Society different forms of liaison between the University and Society in terms of UCE should be studied and the potential benefits in other areas compared. A major related benefit could be to coordinate activities other projects and Thematic Networks. Also other initiatives with organizations related with UCE could be promote like the project of CRE (Conference of Rectors in Europe) – Restructuring the University.